nature net

The **Nature***Kenya* Newsletter **www.naturekenya.org** **June 2002**

NATURALIST'S CORNER

POND SKATERS
The Ripple Effect

by Dino Martins

The river is reduced to a series of shrinking, stagnant pools by the heightening dry seoson. A fallen insect suddenly disturbs the water's oily surfoce. It is a tiny moth, startled from its roost by a passing bird. Within seconds, severol pond skoters zoom in ond devour the hopless moth. Just how do the pond skaters tell when on insect hos become tropped on the woter's surfoce?

It is the ripples creoted by the struggling insect thot alert the pond skoters to the chonces of o meol. The millisecond differentiol ot which the ripple strikes the opposite legs of the pond skoter ollows it to determine the direction ond nature of the prey.

Pond skaters can move over the surface of the water rapidly and without sinking thanks to the dense hairs that cover their legs. These hoirs do not breok the surface tension, allowing the insect to move ropidly forword by rowing with its middle pair of legs.

You can test the pond skaters speedy response for yourself. Simply tap on the woter's surfoce with o blode of grass wherever pond skaters gather- they will come zipping up to you!

more Naturalist's Corner on page 2

TALKS & VIDEOS

ARMY ANTS
Which factors drive the evolution of worker form and structure

by Caspar Schoning

Monday 10 June '02,

5:30 p.m. Ford HALL,

National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi,

Refreshments prior & Town drop off

Mon 8 July 02 – the Ecological Roles of Bats by Paul Webala

Army ants of the genus *Dorylus* (siafu) are perhaps the most conspicuous insects in afrotropical forests and have inspired and impressed naturalists for centuries.

The worker coste is highly polymorphic, that is, workers from the some colony differ dromoticolly both in size ond shope. Cospor is studying the potterns describing morphologicol variation within the worker caste for different species and trying to identify the factors driving the evolution of worker morphology in this genus.

IN THE HOUSE

Nature Kenya at Viking House

PUBLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE IN WESTLANDS COURTESY OF

VIKING HOUSE

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GROUND FLOOR (space shared with East African Wild Life Society)

NATURE KENYA *PHONE NUMBERS* CHANGE WITH NEW PARKLANDS DIGITAL EXCHANGE

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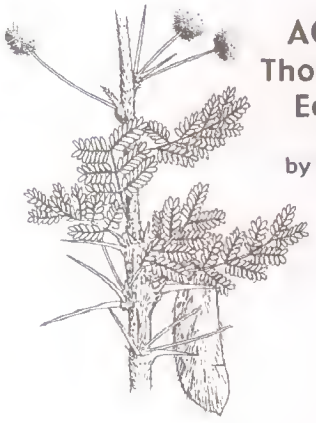
NATURALIST'S CORNER



Acacia stuhlmannii

ACACIAS
Thorn Trees of East Africa

by Najma Dharani

There are few more striking symbols of East Africa than thorn trees – their gnarled branches, graceful form, jagged thorns and abundant blooms, in many ways reflecting the paradoxes of the region.

Acacias are the dominant element of the tree flora in the vegetation of the arid and semi-arid savannah of East Africa. In the region, 53 species have been recorded of which 43 species are found in Kenya.

The Acacias belong to family Mimosaleae (part of the legume group), sub family Mimosoideae. Different species are found in different habitats - examples of those species largely restricted to lowland are *Acacia tartilis* and *Acacia nilatica*, those found on riverbanks and near lakes include *Acacia xanthophlaea* and *Acacia elatior*. Some are restricted to coastal habitats like *Acacia adenacalyx*.

Being one of the most widespread woody plants in East Africa, acacias play an important role for the people and wildlife of semi-arid areas. Acacias supply fodder for domestic and wild animals, fuel, shade and building material. The leaves, pods, bark and gum of many species are also used for traditional medicine, for example *Acacia nilotica* and *Acacia lahai*.

GRASSROOTS GOSSIP

HINDE'S BABBLER

by J M Chege

Mukurwe-ini valleys are ane of the 60 Impartant Bird Areas identified in Kenya, located appraximately 150 km fram Nairobi in the Central pravince highlands. It is unprotected privately owned land, mainly used for subsistence and cash crap farming.

The valleys are home to an endemic, globally threatened bird species, Hinde's Babbler (*Turdaides hindei*). Hinde's Babblers depend on the thickets and bushes occurring along river valleys. Their small range runs from Machakos north to Kianyaga, Meru and Mukurwe-ini.

The babblers are naisy, friendly birds that live in family groups, usually along valleys with streams or rivers. They are about 20–23 cm long, and mainly dark brown in colour. The feathers on the head, back and wings have white edges that form a unique pattern on each individual — each Hinde's Babbler looks distinctive. Their bright red eyes distinguish them from other babbler species.

Hinde's Babblers breeding behaviour is also unusual. Only one pair breeds in each group, while the other birds help their relatives to raise the young. It's like an extended family system. But it also means that the number of breeding birds is much smaller than the total number in the population.

Hinde's Babblers can live quite happily alongside people — they don't mind feeding in coffee or banana plantations. But they need thickets along river valleys to hide in and for building their nests. Preserving these thickets and thorny bushes is good for soil and water conservation, and also good for the birds.

As thickets become scarce, the birds are vulnerable to disturbance from wood collectors, farmers and cattle grazers As a result, their nesting success is low People in some places, such as Kianyaga, also hunt the babblers for food.

There are probably less than ten thousand birds remaining and the population is on the decline. Mukurwe-ini, with its many streams and valleys at 1300-1600 m altitude, is perfect habitat for the babblers - called *kigecegece* or *githegethege* by the local people.

The Hinde's Babbler Volleyball Tournament is a tool to create awareness about the Hinde's Babblers conservation status and the actions necessary to save this endemic and endangered bird species. The tournament, now in its second year, is gaining popularity within a short time. Eight local volleyball teams participated in 2001 and eleven in February 2002.

The taurnament usually takes place at the heart of the IBA. This year a crowd of approximately 350 peaple came ta cheer their teams.

Before the start of the games, the players and fans were given talks on the aims and objectives of the tournament. They are as follows: · to create awareness and trigger interest on birds and environmental conservation · to pool players and fans together to educate them on threats facing Hinde's Babblers, and the possible actions to save them · to encourage groups/teams to work towards a cammon cause of conservation of their environment.

Before the Hinde's Babbler. volleyball cup is presented to the winning team, a skit is performed by the local Site Support Group, Mukurwe-ini Environment Volunteers (MEVO), which further entertains and informs.

The trophy is finally presented by one of the invited government officials amidst jubilations from the excited fans that are left yearning for the next time the tournament will come.

REGULAR ACTIVITIES

BIRD RINGING

Meet at the Museum, Nairobi Botanic Garden, at 7:00 a.m. every Thursday.

SUNDAY BIRDWATCH

Members meet at the Natianal Museum, Nairabi car park at 9:00 a.m. the third Sunday af every manth, **i.e. 16 June**. The members decide where ta ga. Bring lunch

TREE WALK

Guided Tree Walks in the Arboretum an the last Monday, i.e. **24 June from 9:30 a.m.** Meet at the FONA affices beside the Girl Guides HQ. *Thase wha are nat members af FONA or Nature Kenya pay Ksh 100/- fee an arrival at the gate.*

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIRDWALKS

Bird watching walks at sites in ond oround Nairabi. Meet at the National Museum car park every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Return about 12:30 p.m. *Those wha are nat members can get temparary membership at Ksh 100 per birdwalk, payable an arrival at the car park.*

ARABUKO-SOKOKE (COAST)

The Saturday birdwatch with the Arabuko Sokake Farest Guides Assaciatian is on the first Saturday af each manth i.e. **1 June, at 6:30 a.m.** fram the Visitar Centre, Gede. Cast 100/- per person.

FFJ Bird Walk (Coast)

Friends af Fart Jesus birdwalks are held the third Saturday af each manth i.e. **15 June, at 4:00 p.m**. Please call Marlene Reid on (011) 491 648 to confirm

Ngong Road Forest Walks, Nairobi

The Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary Trust Nature walks are held on the first and third Saturdays af the month i.e. **1 & 15 June, at 9:00 a.m.** Meet at the stairs leading to the Restaurant at the Racecaurse.

JUNE DIARY

Sat 1	ASF Birdwalks & NRF walk
Man 10	Siafu talk
Sat 15	FFJ Birdwalk & NRF walk
Sun 16	Sunday Birdwatch
Sat 20	Compost Caurse
Mon 24	Tree Walk
Birdwalks every Wednesday Marning	
Bird ringing every Thursday Morning	

Editor, **Catherine Ngarachu**

Bird Hotline 749957

Greater Painted-Snipe, Lanner Falcon *Seasanal Wetlands near Carnivare, Nairabi/ May* Wednesdoy Marning Birdwalk

Black-bellied Seed-cracker, White-winged Warbler *Nambale, Busia Grassland/ May* Nicademus Nalianya, Martin Kahindi

Jackson's Widowbird *Segera Ranch, Laikipia District/ April* Bernard Amakabe, Bernard Chege, Mercy Njeri, Sylvester Karimi, Wanyaike Wamiti

Great Spotted Cuckoo, Black Coucal *Olonana Camp, Masai Mara/ April* Elly Gathungu

Bat Hawk *ILRI, Nairabi/ April* Brian Finch, Richord & Anne Bishap, Bernd de Bruijn

Long-legged Buzzard Brian Finch **Heuglin's Gull,** *Nairabi N.P./ April* Brian Finch, Bernd de Bruijn

Pringle's Puffback *Olepalas* **Olive-tree Warbler,** *Woterpaint, Oltepesi/ April* Brian Finch, Bernd de Bruijn, Itai Shanni, Shailesh Patel

Little Bittern *Laresha Ridge, Nairabi/ April* Wednesday Marning Birdwalk

Pectoral Sandpiper *Nairabi N.P./ April* Brian Finch, Richard & Anne Bishap

Request to birders

Have you seen large flocks or roosting sites of the following birds:

- Red-headed Quelea
- Yellow-mantled Widawbird
- Narthern Red Bishap
- Yellow-crowned Bishap
- Fire-fronted Bishop
- Parasitic Weaver

Then please drop Nicodemus a line at the Ornithology Dept, Nairabi Museum
kbirds@africaonline.co.ke

DECLARATION

Nature Kenya daes nat accept any responsibility whatsaever in respect of negligence of any of its staff, valunteers ar members arganising the autings/trips or for any loss, injury, death ar damage to property.

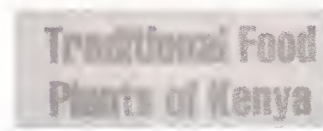
COMPOST COURSE

Thursday 20 June '02
Nairobi Arboretum,
9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Cost 600/- per person

A ane day campasting caurse, which will include basic landscaping · hedge pruning · plant propagatian · soil aeration · calaur wheels · tree trimming · balance.

Participants will be pravided with writing and reading material (English and Kiswahili) and certificate. Lunch alsa provided. Register with the Nature Kenya affice.

REVIEW by Anne Powys, an author of *Pinguone, Kenya*



by Patrick M. Maundu, Grace W. Ngugi, Christine H. S. Kabuye @ 1000/-

I feel campelled ta write a few words obout this book as I have found it to be invaluable, I carry it around with me everywhere.

The research and campilatian af this work is enormous, I know the time and miles of trovel it tokes.

The descriptions of the plants are clear, the simple drawings making it easy ta recagnize the most obvious characters.

There is so much information, thought and feeling on the faad plants, in the text, that brings the plants to life.

The contents of this work are a very valuable insight as ta haw vital our flara is, and how it is only through a better understanding that we may appreciate this.

I seriously recommend that anybody who is interested in aur heritage, the preservation of our precious environment, buy this book!!

PUBLICATIONS

A reference on oreos important for birds in Ugonda now available at the Noture Kenyo office!

Important Bird Areas of Uganda

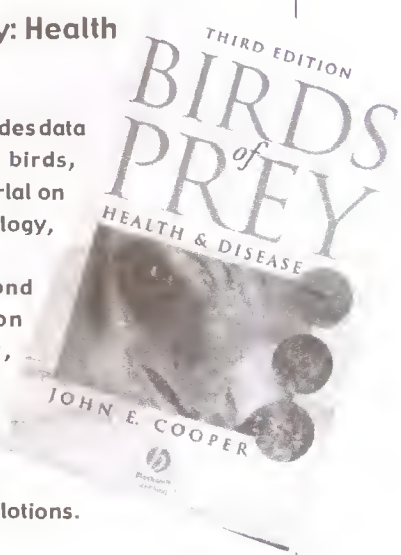
Achilles Byoruhanga, Pantaleon Kosomo ond Derek Pomeroy

Price Ksh 1,800

Softback. Approx 166 pages

illustrations, mops, tobles

Birds of Prey: Health & Disease



This edition includes data on free-living birds, additional materlal on fractures, pothology, legistlotion and poisons, ond new sections on neonatology, health monitoring, captive-breeding ond host-parasite relotions.

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NETWORKING

6th World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls

Budapest, Hungary, 18 - 25 May 2003

At the invitation of BirdLife Hungary the 6th WORLD CONFERENCE ON BIRDS OF PREY AND OWLS will be held from 18-25 Moy 2003 in Budopest, Hungary. All persons interested in either of the two groups of birds in question (Folconiformes ond Strigiformes) ore cordially invited to attend the Conference, irrespective of whether or not they are members of WWGBP , the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls

For more information on the conference visit www.raptors-international.de/NEXT_CONFERENCE/next_conference.html

Other contacts:
E-moil: WWGBP@ool.com
www.Raptors-International.de

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